

PGV 1.20/8 1931: Sept. 1

Sept. 1  
c. 2

# The Orphan Child Of American Politics



By  
**GIFFORD PINCHOT**  
*Governor of Pennsylvania*



Text of Speech Delivered Before  
Missouri Farmers' Association  
at Sedalia, Mo., Sept. 1, 1931

F 25

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

# The Orphan Child of American Politics

**By GIFFORD PINCHOT**

*Governor of Pennsylvania*

For generations the farmer has been the orphan child of American politics. I am for taking him into the family.

For generations the Government of the United States believed that the only thing it needed to do for the farmer was to help him grow more crops. What he got for his crops when grown, and what kind of a life he and his family led on the farm—with these things the Government held it had no concern.

The Government shut its eyes to two of the three great farm ideals—better farming, better business for the farmer and better living on the farm. It thought it was doing its full duty when it considered only the production of food.

The Government forgot that our country cannot prosper unless the farmer not only produces well, but sells his crops well, and lives well with his family on the farm. It is high time to keep that central fact in mind.

Agriculture is the biggest and the most important producing business in the United States. The farmer is a producer—the greatest in the land. But he is also a consumer—in normal times the largest in the Nation. And the consuming power of the farmer is one of the biggest of the things we cannot get on without.

We cannot get on without it and still prosper as a Nation. We are trying to get on without it now, and the result does its own talking. Could any such depression as this exist if the farmers were able to buy. That question answers itself.

Suppose the buying power of our farmers could suddenly be restored. What effect would that have on the return of prosperity? If their buying power came back, the farmers could spend six or eight billions—billions, not millions—in a year on new fences, new buildings and repairs to buildings, and on clothes, shoes, radios, automobiles, enough to start factories in every State and employ hundreds of thousands of

men. Would that help the situation in America? And how!

There can be no secure and permanent prosperity in the United States unless agriculture is prosperous. For years we have been saying it. For years we may have believed it. But never as a Nation have we acted on our belief.

Do the people of America understand what has happened to our farmers in the last ten years?

From 1920 to 1930 our National income is reported to have increased twenty-two billions; our farm income decreased four billions. More income in America, but thousands of millions less on the farm.

From 1920 to 1930 our farm debt is reported to have increased from four billions to fourteen billions. In ten years the farmer's debts grew by an amount almost equal to all the vast sums owed to the United States by our allies in the war. For every dollar owed by farmers at the beginning of those ten years they owed three dollars and a half at the end. For ten years their debts increased a thousand million dollars a year.

From 1920 to 1930 the value of farms shrank by twenty billions, or something like the value of all the railroads in the United States. The capital invested in the farmer's land, his buildings, and his farming equipment generally decreased by this gigantic sum. And at the same time the capital invested in industry increased by more than the twenty billions the farmers lost.

It is reported that from 1926 to 1930, 682,000 farmers lost their homes by foreclosure. In five years 10% of all farmers failed so badly that their property was taken away from them. And with the farmer, banks failed, merchants failed, and whole communities were stricken.

All this amounts to a farm disaster unprecedented in human history, so far as I know. If it does not show that agriculture has been getting the neck of the chicken at the National table, I know no way to prove it.

A man ill fed develops weakness. Today the weakened farmer is staggering under his load.

Now when a man is staggering under a heavy load,

you can help him in two ways: One is to add to his strength, and the other is to cut down the load.

You can add to the farmer's strength by increasing the return he gets from his farming. You can cut down his load by reducing the amount he has to pay out.

The best way to increase the return the farmer gets is to carry out the promise of the Republican National Platform, to put agriculture on "a basis of economic equality with other industries."

The best way to cut down the farmer's load is to reduce his taxes. In Pennsylvania we have found a way to add to the farmer's strength and to cut down his load, both at the same time.

During the last campaign I promised, if elected, to see that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over 20,000 miles of the township roads—the farmer's roads—to maintain them and build them at State expense. This means that at last the farmers will be taken out of the mud. It also means that a yearly load of at least \$10,000,000 will be lifted from the shoulders of farmer tax payers in Pennsylvania.

My opponent in the election declared that it could not be done.

Two weeks ago it was done. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania then became responsible for more miles of State road, over and above what it had already, than any other State in the Union has in all today.

Nothing like this has ever been done before. And my judgment is that no more effective form of farm relief has even been devised.

By this one step Pennsylvania has assured to her farmers good roads—roads over which man and wife and child can travel to market, to church, to school, to the store, and to the neighbors at any time of year. You ought to see how the farmers like it. The same measure that lifts a huge burden from the backs of the hardest taxed people in Pennsylvania will bring better farming, better business, and better living on the farm.

Again, the load of educating the children is far heavier on the widely scattered taxpayers in the country than in the densely settled towns. The

farmer who lives far from the school, as most of them do, must provide costly transportation for his children, often over wretched roads that greatly increase its cost.

Another example. The city bears the expense of maintaining schools for the training of children who will stay in the city and increase its wealth. But tens of thousands of country children are trained in the country at country expense for the work of the towns, to which they go and to which they bring strong bodies, keen minds, sturdy character, and the breath of the open fields. In Pennsylvania this training for the towns amounts to about one-third or one-half of the work of the country schools.

We in Pennsylvania have recognized the unequal burden put upon the farmer for the schooling of his children. At the beginning of my first term as Governor, and I am proud to say at my recommendation, the Legislature heavily increased the State subsidy to the smaller country schools. At the start of my second term, a bill I signed with real satisfaction authorized the largest contribution ever made as a State to the poorer schools in the open country.

A penny saved is a penny earned. A dollar taken off the farmer's taxes is worth to him just as much as a dollar added to his income. Every man who knows the country knows that the farmer's taxes are heavy out of all proportion to those on other occupations and to the farmer's ability to pay. The farmer's load is beyond reason. It is farm relief of the most practical sort to cut it down as we in Pennsylvania have done.

The farmer pays too much. In 1925 Pennsylvania's farm population was 9.62% of all our people, but the farmers got but 3.68% of the total income. Of the farmer's income 13.6% was required to pay taxes, whereas non-farm incomes paid but 9.5%.

So much for lightening the load. What about strengthening the man who staggers under it?

Everybody knows that, generally speaking, the farmer buys what he needs to buy in a protected market, and sells what he has to sell in an unprotected market. It is true that there is a tariff on certain farm products. But what good has a tariff

of 42 cents a bushel on wheat done for the Kansas farmer who sold his crop for 22 cents?

I am a protectionist. I believe in a tariff. But the kind of tariff I believe in is one whose good effects appear not only in the profits of capital and in the wages of labor, but also in the returns of the farmer.

I believe in the protection of American workers. But that protection must not be limited to people who live in towns. If protection is a sound policy for industry, why is it not a sound policy for agriculture?

The tariff is not a price-fixing device, but it is a price-raising device. It has the backing of our people because it does actually help industry. But if a price-raising device that helps is good for industry, praiseworthy for industry, legitimate for industry, what is wrong with a price-raising device that will actually help the farmer?

An agricultural tariff does not in practice give protection to the more important farm crops, because their price is fixed in a world market. Then we must add something else that will make it work. And that is where the Equalization Fee comes in.

I believe in the Equalization Fee. It may not work every time or for every crop. But I believe in it as the most hopeful plan yet devised for putting the farmer on the basis of economic equality promised by the Republican National Platform. I was for it in the beginning and I am for it now.

The Debenture Plan unquestionably has its merits. But the question is not whether we shall have the Equalization Fee or the Debenture Plan, but whether, by whatever means, the farm industry shall be put on a basis of economic equality with other industries.

We have heard too much loose talk about the foolishness and wickedness of attempting to interfere with the law of supply and demand. We hear it mostly where the farmer is concerned.

The deplovers of interference believe in a tariff. So do I. But if the tariff is not an interference with the law of supply and demand, what is it?

They believe in controlling the railroads. But if the Esch-Cummins Bill, which guarantees a fixed re-

turn to the railroads, is not an interference with the law of supply and demand, please give it a name.

What is the fixing of rates for public utilities, on the theory of restraining their greed and giving the consumer a square deal, but a wise and necessary interference with the law of supply and demand?

And if the law of supply and demand can be interfered with in the case of industry, in the case of the railroads, in the case of the public utilities, is there any reason why it cannot be interfered with in the case of the farmer?

As I understand it, all that the farmer asks is to have done for him what industry asks of the tariff—to equalize the cost of production as against the production costs of similar producers in foreign lands. Is there anything unfair in that? What is sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander.

Is protection right for the one and wrong for the other? Is agriculture to be treated forever as an orphan child?

Settling the farm problem, the problem of the orphan child, is a favorite indoor sport for many a city man who knows nothing about it. Many a city man has taken the job of settling it, and not one of them has settled it yet. And on the other hand many a country store has around the cracker barrel its circle of solons who can tell you just how to handle the unemployment problem in the towns.

The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and the farmer his own troubles. Long association with farmers has convinced me that they know their own business best.

Whether I do or not, I ought to know something about them. Years ago I was elected one of three honorary members of the National Farmers Union, of whom Theodore Roosevelt was another. I was a member of Roosevelt's Country Life Commission I have taken the highest degree in the National Grange. And I was one of the founders, and for many years a member of the Executive Committee, of the National Board of Farm Organizations.

Many things about farming I do not know, but this I do—the farmer ought to have something to say about how his problem should be settled.

Up to now the National problem of farm relief has been dealt with in Congress not as the farmers wanted it handled, but as the city men decided it must be handled. And this was anything but just, for I call your particular attention to the fact that the farmers have voted steadily for the help that industry asked for in the form in which industry asked for it. The farmers of America have stood loyally by the tariff, even when they suffered from the tariff. They have done their best to give industry what industry wanted and as industry wanted it.

Tit for tat is fair play. In all conscience industry ought to return the favor by giving agriculture what agriculture wants in the form in which agriculture wants it.

The farmers asked for the Equalization Fee. They asked for the Debenture Plan. Instead they were given that huge and costly lemon, the Farm Board, for which they did not ask.

The Government of the United States has established an organization throughout the world to find markets for American manufactured products. Governor Reed of Kansas says: "I do not know of any serious effort on the part of the Government to extend export trade in wheat and meat and other things. Until it does so, it seems rather inconsistent to offer as the only remedy a curtailment of our production."

In order to prevent future surpluses, the farmer is asked to reduce his acreage. I am not saying that it should not be done. But I point out that it is easier said than done, and that it has its disadvantages.

A steel mill can reduce its production to an exact specified amount, and can do it with certainty every time. But one trouble about reducing crop acreage is that a reduction in acreage may or may not mean a reduction in yield.

Smaller acreage may mean, and often has meant, larger production. On the other hand smaller acreage, if followed by a bad growing season, might conceivably reduce the crop enough to put this country on an import basis.

Moreover, if American wheat farmers reduce their acreage, what is to prevent Canada and Australia from increasing theirs? And moreover again, a

farmer to live must grow crops on his land. If he transfers his field from one crop he may transfer the surplus with it. If he reduces his acreage to half that of his neighbor, one thing he can be positively sure of is that he will get only half as much money for his crop. Another is that his cost per bushel will rise.

Crop area reduction, like the Farm Board's childish proposal to plow up every third row of cotton, is a fascinating subject of conversation. To make it real would require, in the case of wheat, not only agreement among farmers but agreement among nations. In any case it does not meet the farmer's pressing need for immediate relief.

Instead of this uncertain remedy, why not turn to safer ground? The farmer gets a ridiculously small part of what the consumer pays for food the farmer grows. The cost of distribution index compiled by the New York State College of Agriculture is today twice as high as it was before the war.

The price of wheat falls to disastrous levels, and the price of bread stays pretty much where it was. The price of corn falls till the Corn Belt suffers calamity, and pork chops refuse to follow.

There are too many middle profits between producer and consumer. The middleman regularly pays the farmer too little and charges the consumer too much. And he does it on the war-time basis, when wheat was selling at 5 times and more per bushel than it has been sold for this year.

Better methods of distribution would give the farmer a larger share of the consumer's dollar without costing the consumer a single additional cent. What we need, and need tremendously in that connection, is to take up the slack.

Part of the cost of distribution is for freight. And this is the time chosen by the railroads for piling heavier freight rates than ever on the farmer's shoulders. In my opinion this is a time for reducing and not for increasing the freight burden on the overburdened farmer.

Years ago when the farmer asked for economic justice he was given more credit. He needs credit now to help him carry this year's crop. But in gen-

eral what the farmer needs today is not more credit to go more into debt, but better prices the better to get out of debt.

Because the farmer raises and sells food which the worker in town must buy and eat, because one is the buyer and the other the seller, the two have failed to realize their common interest. It has been made to appear that there is a conflict of interest between them. That is not so.

The very contrary is true. The man on the land produces what the man in the city buys. The man in the city produces what the man on the land buys. Each must be able to sell to the other what he produces or there will be no good times in America.

This depression has shown us that the thing labor wants most of all is a market—that the thing the farmer wants most of all is a market. The best market for labor is the farmer; the best market for the farmer is labor. Neither can be prosperous unless the purchasing power of the other is sustained.

In the light of their real interests, the worker in the field and the worker on the pavement are not foes but friends, not competitors but partners. What makes steady prosperity for the one makes it for the other. When either cannot buy from the other, hard times are at hand for both.

Therefore there can be no real antagonism between the man who works on the land and the man who works in a mill or a factory. They are like two horses pulling the same plow—turning the same furrow to raise the common crop of prosperity.

Labor and the farmer are cheated by the same people, despised by the same people, exploited by the same people, and kept apart by the same people. The people who have stood and still stand in the way of real help for the farmer are the same people who are blocking the way of real help for the unemployed. Yet too often labor and the farmer let these same people run their policies for them.

If all this is true, then the plain people, wherever they live and whatever they do, have a common cause and a very urgent need to stand together.

Nothing could do this country so much good as for the farmer and labor to work together for the wel-

fare of both. If the farmer in the country and the worker in the town would join hands in their common interest, they would control the Nation.

I am not talking about political control. I do not refer to a third party. On the contrary, I am talking economic control for the greatest good of the greatest number, which is the object of all government.

Could any power in America prevent the farmers from getting the Equalization Fee or the Debenture Plan, and getting it quick, if labor organizations and farm organizations stood together in demanding it? Could any power in America prevent labor from getting a good anti-injunction law from Congress if the farmers joined with labor in insisting upon it? If ever the two work together, neither money nor privilege, neither financial concentration nor political conspiracy, will be able to stand in their way.

Divided, the plain people have watched the special interests pay the piper and call the tune. United, nothing could stop them from calling their own tune and dancing to it.

In the great disaster which has fallen upon the workers in town and country, each is apt to forget the suffering of the other. Each thinks of relief for his own misfortune, and fails to remember that the surest way to get relief for either is to combine in demanding relief for both.

Because the Constitution of Pennsylvania and of other States forbid direct assistance from the State, because other sources of help cannot meet the need, because Federal aid is absolutely essential, I have urged the President to call an extra session of Congress to deal with the problem of feeding the hungry when winter comes.

Understand me. I do not ask for the dole. The dole is money paid to the idle. I ask for food for those who cannot get work.

This Nation has appropriated public money over and over again when disaster threatened in distant parts of the world. I say again, as I did at Detroit, that if it was right to feed strangers, as it was, it cannot be wrong to appropriate public money for the relief of our own people who are hungry. For charity begins at home.

How on earth the Federal Government can listen and respond to the call of the needy in foreign lands, as it should, and then shut its ears to the same call at home, is beyond my understanding. If that is not discrimination, I do not know the meaning of the word.

I ask for an extra session because the task is so gigantic that we cannot afford delay. We cannot safely wait for the regular session in December.

But if an extra session is needed to relieve one kind of distress in the cities, why is it not equally needed to relieve another kind of distress in the open country? The time the farmers need help is now. I believe help is needed, and needed at the earliest possible moment, for more things are at stake in this depression than many of us are willing to admit.

More than anything else in this country we need to put the interests of the plain people first. We need to keep clearly in mind that the purpose of our political system is not unclean money but free men.

But unclean money has come to the front—money gouged from the people by excessive and unfair rates for electricity, gas, water, and transportation, by pyramided stock and grasping holding companies, by write ups and a million other shady tricks.

Our people know that unclean money sits in the seats of the mighty. They know they are not getting a square deal. Therefore they are like a hive of bees, full of agitation before taking flight. And when bees leave the hive, on what branch they will swarm no one can foretell.

The farmer ought to come into his own. The most valuable citizen of this or any other country is the man who owns the land from which he makes his living. No other man has such a stake in the country. No other man lends such steadiness and stability to our national life.

I tell you that the welfare of America, the safety of America, the preservation of our institutions, and the security of our children depend upon justice to the American farmer. And justice to the American farmer must be justice as the farmer himself understands justice—and not some alleged panacea devised

by men who neither know his problems nor comprehend his point of view.

The farmer is the backbone of the Nation. If anybody in America is American, he is. No red flag flies over any farmhouse.

I am against treating the farmer any longer as the orphan child of American politics. I want to see him taken into the family, with a place at the table at every meal, an equal helping from every dish, and his fair share of the pudding.



